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SITUATIONS AND EXPERIENCE.[1]

OF the two expressions, "situation" and "experience," the latter is the more inclusive. Situations arise within experience, not experiences within situations. A situation arises within an experience when there is something the matter, and readjustment is necessary. So long as experience continues to be harmonious, situations do not arise. Professor Dewey speaks of experiences of thirst, of illness, of operating a typewriter, of social converse, and of æsthetic appreciation, while he mentions situations of prizing and aversion, of seeking and finding, of enjoyment and suffering, of production and employment, of manipulation and destruction. Experiences and situations always occur in space and time. Professor Dewey says that, as a person operates his typewriter, his experience includes "all the physical features of the environment extending out into space no one can say how far, and all the habits and interests extending backward and forward in time, of the organism which uses the typewriter."[2] I interpret this to mean that the person's experience includes much of which he is not, never has been, and never will be consciously aware, in fact, all the conditions in the environment that temporally, spatially or dynamically are related to what he is now doing or purposing. The advantage in using the word 'experience' rather than 'environment' or 'world' is that it "suggests something indispensable which these terms omit: namely, an actual focusing of the world at one point in a focus of immediate shining apparency."[3] In other words, there is always a conscious focus to an experience, and this is the point where reconstruction is most actively taking place. Situations and experiences may be limited to a small space and to brief intervals of time, or they may be of vast extent and

[1] This paper was read at the meeting of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association at Vassar College last December. I have added two paragraphs in response to questions and comments offered on that occasion.

[2] *Essays in Experimental Logic*, p. 6.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

duration. As a follower of Professor Dewey says: "situations vary in scope; they may be matters of an instant or of centuries, of only individual concern, or of world-wide significance."[1]

No experience is reflective to begin with, and many experiences never involve reflection at all. Consciousness, even, is "only a small and shifting portion of experience."[2] Possibly no conscious situation is totally non-reflective.[3] But there are many situations in which reflection is slight and incidental. So far as a man can get out of a difficulty by simpler mental processes, he will not take the trouble to think or to reflect. Who ever succeeded in getting his pupils to think when it was possible for them to memorize or to 'bluff'? Reflection only becomes prominent in situations where there has been a serious conflict among the factors of the previous non-reflective experience that could not be solved in a simpler way. Originally, as man emerged from the level of the lower animals and first began to reflect, such conflicts were exclusively due to difficulties in satisfying the instinctive needs he experienced. These even then must have included the impulses of hunger, sex, fear, anger, disgust, tender emotion, gregariousness, constructiveness, acquisitiveness, self-assertion and subjection, to mention Professor McDougall's list of the principal primary instincts, all of which are present in the animals most closely related to man. Now, that the struggle for mere survival has been replaced by the endeavor for a richer and fuller life, and the evolution of values from instincts[4] has been effected, the reflective situation may be prompted by any felt inadequacy in any of the goods that man has learned to prize—economic and bodily values, values of recreation and association, character, æsthetic, intellectual and religious values, to borrow Professor Everett's classification.[5] Thus numerous are the desires that prompt to the reflective situation, according to instrumentalists.[6] Whenever reconstruction is necessary, in order

[1] Herbert W. Schneider, in the *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XIV, p. 714.

[2] Dewey, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

[3] *Idem.*, p. 244.

[4] *Cf.* my paper, "The Evolution of Values from Instincts," PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW, Vol. XXIV, pp. 165–183.

[5] *Moral Values*, Chap. VII.

[6] A. W. Moore, "Some Lingering Misconceptions of Instrumentalism," *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XVII, pp. 514–519.

to satisfy any human interest, and the interest is profound enough, and reconstruction by other means is impossible, reflective thinking may be expected to arise.

Experiences have a great deal in common with one another. They extend indefinitely in space and time; one of their elements is always a conscious organism; they have foci; conflicts occur in them which give rise to situations, and if these conflicts are serious enough, reflection takes place. Reflective situations, too, have common features, and they operate in accordance with common laws. Dualisms arise within them between material and purposes, subject and object, facts and ideas,[1] the physical and the psychical,[2] and so on. These dualisms, however, are incidental to the resolution of the conflict, and are reconciled when the resolution has been effected. Situations fall into different types, and so it is possible to speak of 'the economic situation' or 'phase' in distinction from the 'ethical situation' or the 'ethical phase.'[3]

How are situations related to one another? The outcome of any reflective situation is retained in a person's experience, and when another problem arises, he can profit by what he has learned in the past, and utilize it, so far as it is workable. Situations may not necessarily arise directly out of previous situations, but they arise out of an experience that is continuous. An individual's entire lifetime is a single experience.[4] Nor can we stop here. Situations often involve more than one conscious individual. The experience in which such a situation arises is a social experience. When a farmer borrows money of a country bank cashier, the situation is not in all respects a simple one in the experience of the two men. The rate of interest and other terms of the loan are resultants of a complex economic situation that involves all the countries of the earth, and is, in part, the effect of the great war, and therefore of the events that have occurred in European history

[1] E. L. Talbert, *The Dualism of Fact and Idea in Its Social Implications.*

[2] G. H. Mead, *The Definition of the Psychical.*

[3] H. W. Stuart, "Valuation as a Logical Process" in *Studies in Logical Theory* (edited by Dewey) and "Phases of the Economic Interest" in *Creative Intelligence* (edited by Dewey).

[4] Even in pathological cases, like amnesia, divided personalities, etc., the experience is in some respects continuous. And for none of us is memory perfect, or experience in other respects perfectly articulated.

during the past hundred years. There is, therefore, a vast network of situations and experiences, for the pragmatist, comparable in some respects to the 'system of relations' of which the universe of the speculative idealist consists. The pragmatist affirms that for most problems this vast network of situations and experiences need not be taken into account. The cashier does not need to be a specialist in modern European history to know how much interest to charge the farmer. Accordingly, for many situations we might say that the doctrine of the externality of relations holds pragmatically. It is possible for practical purposes to isolate a particular situation and solve the immediate problem in hand, without being guilty of a vicious abstraction.

But while the bank cashier and the farmer can isolate their problem in a detached situation of their own, the philosopher cannot do likewise. Confronting him is a larger situation. He must discover the laws that govern all situations and all experiences in all of their relationships. The fact confronts him that all situations arise in one common human experience (or network of interrelated experiences if a more pluralistic mode of statement be preferred), extending in time from pre-historic man and in space to all races in communication with one another. Nor could the pragmatistic philosopher consider his task complete when he had formulated the laws and studied the general course of this one experience (or network of experiences), of which all detached experiences are portions, and in which all situations arise. He must still consider the place that experience occupies in the world as a whole.

Possibly it may be objected that I am speaking of 'experience' and 'situation' as if they might become terms in reflective judgments, which they cannot.[1] But if we could in no way judge of the nature of experience, and its position in the world as a whole, we would be forced into an agnosticism more complete than that of the *Critique of Pure Reason,* taken apart from Kant's two more constructive *Critiques.* For there are no *a priori* categories for the pragmatist that afford universal and necessary knowledge for all experience, but merely working hypotheses bound to suffer unpredictable change and reconstruction in future situations.

[1] Dewey, *op. cit.,* pp. 8–11, and footnote.

The agnostic conclusion would only be forced upon the pragmatist if it could be shown that there is no situation that throws light upon the relationship between experience and the world as a whole. Such, however, is not the case. There are what we might call 'cosmic situations.'

A 'cosmic situation,' as here conceived, is a reflective situation with the following distinctive characteristics: (1) An emergency arises in which one or more individuals or groups of individuals are forced to make a decision in the light of conditions that involve an interpretation of the entire course of human experience. (2) The decision, once made, and acted upon, is followed by consequences in concrete human experience that either confirm or refute the beliefs or hypotheses which prompted to the decision. (3) Such situations often (if not always) involve the relationship of human experience to external reality, and the place of each in the world as a whole. This last statement is meant to allow for the possibility that some pragmatists may affirm that experience and the world as a whole are identical.

A cosmic situation confronts the philosophical interpreter of any line of historical development that has taken place in human experience—whether of social evolution, law, justice, morals, art, religion, the sciences, or philosophy itself. For such a student discovers that there has been, with numerous windings and turnings and lapses, a gradually increasing rational insight and control of physical nature and of human conduct. He finds, though laws may only have been discovered because the inadequacy of the factors in some concrete empirical situation called attention to them, that such laws, once discovered, interpret an abiding reality of which our knowledge is constantly increasing. We are now able to control our environment, and to some extent to remake it, just because we more perfectly understand it.

Nor is the interpretation of such lines of historical development from primitive man to the present merely of speculative interest. Decisions of the utmost practical importance should be made in the light of such interpretations.

As an example, one might instance the immigration question as it confronts the United States to-day. Are the races of mankind

at bottom homogeneous, are their innate qualities identical, and are differences in cultural attainment entirely due to the presence or absence of opportunity? If so, we can continue to have faith in the melting pot. Or has the progress of northern Europeans been due to the presence, in some of their members at least, of innate qualities transmitted to them as a consequence of a biological variation in their pre-historic ancestors, a variation that did not occur among the ancestors of other races?[1] On the correct answers to these questions depends the solution of an empirical situation in which as a nation we find ourselves to-day.

Another illustration. Desirous of the social well being, what should be our attitude toward organized religion? If we wish to ascertain the function of organized religion in human associated life, we must inquire what was its origin, what the rôle it has played in various civilizations. We cannot have too broad an anthropological and historical horizon for the attack of this problem, a correct solution of which may be of momentous importance for modern society. Now suppose that reflection convinces us that organized religion plays a vital and indispensable function in associated life, but that the religious cults of to-day require reconstruction to bring them into harmony with modern scientific knowledge and the social needs of our time. In this case, the problem of religious reconstruction necessitates, not only a consideration of the entire course of human experience beginning with prehistoric times, but also of the place of human experience in the world as a whole. For if the conception of God is merely a working tool in human experience, and refers to nothing that has objective existence except in human experience, if it is merely an idealization of human aspirations, then the worship of a Deity must be expected either soon to disappear, or else radically to change its character.[2] In that event, we ought to be studying very seriously the religious possibilities of Positivism, of Ethical Culture, of esoteric Buddhism, and of other forms of religious or quasi-religious association and activity that dispense with a God.

[1] *Cf.* William McDougall, *The Group Mind,* part III, and *Is America Safe for Democracy?*

[2] *Cf.* James B. Pratt, *The Religious Consciousness,* pp. 41; 208, f.; 334–336.

On the other hand, if considerations regarding the world as a whole are favorable to belief in God, religious reconstruction can probably successfully be effected within the working limits of Christianity and Judaism. This illustration would still hold, if it were to appear that organized religion really plays no indispensable rôle in associated life and can safely be allowed to disappear. For to establish this conclusion, it would be needful to enter into a study of human experience in its relation to the world as a whole.

Out of regard for those who dislike religious illustrations, let us glance at an ethical one. Recall Huxley's Romanes Lecture. If moral evolution were antagonistic to the cosmic process, as Huxley maintained, this fact would have to be taken constantly into account by the educator, the statesman, the philanthropist, and the social reformer, when they are considering what it is practicable to undertake. The pragmatist, who believes that the environment may be reconstructed almost indefinitely by wisely directed human effort, is in direct antagonism to Huxley. He cannot, however, prove that he is right and Huxley wrong, without entering into a discussion of the relation of humanity as a whole to the cosmic process as a whole. Here, then, is a practical problem that has its bearings upon no end of empirical situations.

These three illustrations of cosmic situations will perhaps suffice to warrant the claim that the serious study of human experience in its spatial and temporal entirety, and in its relation to the world as a whole, are demanded for the solution of actual problems in modern life,—in pragmatic terminology, for the resolution of conflicting elements in concrete reflective situations that have risen in modern experience.

Let us now look at the problem of the place of human experience in the world as a whole. Shall we affirm that experience (or a network of experiences) includes all that exists,[1] and therefore experience and the world as a whole are identical? If a pragmatist were to say this, it does not seem to me that he would

[1] Whether reality should be interpreted to include subsistents as well as existents is a question that does not enter within the scope of this paper, as it is immaterial to its main contentions.

necessarily be a mentalist, for he could still affirm that there are elements in experience that are not psychical; but he would certainly be committed to some form of idealism. For he would be affirming that physical objects have no existence except as parts of experiences that have foci in conscious processes.

If the pragmatist is unwilling forthwith to become an idealist, he will affirm that something exists in the world besides experiences. What is this? Electric charges, he might say, organized in electrons, moving in space and time, and subject to mechanical causation. He could refer to the physicists and chemists for a more detailed reply. But what grounds are there for supposing that the theories of the physicist and chemist should be accepted by the pragmatistic philosopher? Simply that these theories are the outcome of several centuries of brilliant achievement, that they have proved effective in solving the problems of all the situations which those sciences have confronted down to the present time. They have worked pragmatically.[1] If new situations should arise in the future for which these theories should prove inadequate, other conceptions would take their place; but these future conceptions would have grown out of the present theories, and would conserve in better forms of statement all that has now been experienced. What the physicists and chemists now tell us is of course not *absolute* truth—the pragmatist knows no such thing—but it is the nearest approach to this imaginary goal that man has yet attained.[2]

Moreover, I hope that the realistically disposed pragmatist will not stop here in his account of the world external to human expe-

[1] This, as it seems to me, is the best argument that the critical realists can advance for the independent existence of the external world governed by scientific laws. It is much better than to attribute our knowledge of the external world to an intuition, or to position or postulation of some kind, or merely to assert it dogmatically as if it were a *credo*. In private conversations with two of the critical realists, I was glad to find that they agree with me on this point. Perhaps here is an indication of a possible *rapprochement* between Pragmatism and Critical Realism.

[2] I do not think that this paragraph is incompatible with what Professor Dewey says about the nature of scientific judgments in his *Logical Conditions of a Scientific Treatment of Morality* (*cf.* §3, and the Summary at the end), nor with his *Essays in Experimental Logic*.

rience. According to pragmatists purposes and values, including truth itself, only exist within experiences—or even only within reflective situations. But reflective situations arise within experiences, and experiences arise within the world as a whole. To be sure, inorganic matter existed alone on this particular planet long before any experiences or situations occurred upon it. If it were possible to consider the condition of this planet alone, abstracted spatially from other parts of the heavens, and temporally from its later history, we should have to say that it was utterly devoid of anything teleological. But the pragmatist cannot consider the planet in this abstract manner, for it is not thus that it enters his reflective experience. While the concrete cosmic situation involving the problem of the evolution of the earth in its relation to human experience certainly begins temporally in a period when the earth consisted of nothing but inorganic matter, it only terminates with the present state of affairs. Neither temporal beginning nor present termination can be abstracted from the whole situation and considered alone.

So the pragmatist, as I believe, is logically forced to give a teleological interpretation of terrestrial evolution. Professor Henderson's arguments,[1] though not always stated with the niceness of a technical metaphysician, appear to me to be substantially sound. Pragmatism, for me, is thus led to the acceptance of very much of what has been affirmed by contemporary speculative idealists. For instance, I agree with Professor Pringle-Pattison[2] that man is organic to the world, and that the world is organic to man; that since secondary qualities and values exist within human experience they exist within the world as a whole, and constitute a part of its meaning and significance. Two reservations, however, need to be made. First, since such beliefs as these cannot be tested so thoroughly within human experience as can the doctrines of physics and chemistry, they are less certain. They are not even so close an approximation to the imaginary goal of

[1] Lawrence J. Henderson, *The Fitness of the Environment. The Order of Nature.* Articles in the PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW, Vols. XXV and XXVII.

[2] Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison, *The Idea of God in the Light of Recent Philosophy,* lecture VI.

absolute truth as are the affirmations of the physical sciences. Yet they are approximations, thought out with logical care, and confirmed by such empirical evidence as we possess. The second reservation is, that there is too much dysteleology in human experience to warrant the conclusion that the world as a whole is *completely* organic and *completely* teleological. The pragmatist is a meliorist, not an optimist. He certainly cannot accept the idealistic solution of the problem of evil. He believes that unity and teleology are making headway in the portion of the universe in which we live, in part as a result of our efforts; but they have not yet gained a complete victory. Like Professor Hoernlé,[1] he believes that the world is both mechanical and teleological, and that the teleology is logically dominant over the mechanism; but the pragmatist does not think that this dominance is complete in the temporal order, though he believes that we can and should help to make it more nearly complete than is now the case.[2]

Perhaps it will be objected that, whatever may be the merit or lack of merit in what I have been saying, at any rate it is not Pragmatism. Well, to be frank, I do not know. I should like to believe that I have been faithful to the philosophy in which I was nurtured. But the claim of truth, as I can see it, is in any event the stronger one.

In defence of my claim to be a pragmatist, I would say in the first place that the view here defended is pragmatic in its claim that reflective thought actually modifies conditions in the external world. In each of the three cosmic situations offered as an illustration, a correct solution must leave circumstances different from what they were before, and so must also an incorrect solution. Whether or not a solution is correct means, of course, whether or not the hypothesis adopted leads to consequences that could have been logically and rationally expected. Obviously the only way in which reflective thinking ever modifies external conditions is through the conduct to which it prompts. But this, I suppose,

[1] R. A. F. Hoernlé, *Studies in Contemporary Metaphysics*, Chaps. VI and VII.

[2] This famous position of James seems to be held by Professor E. G. Spaulding, *The New Rationalism*, pp. 518–521.

is all that any pragmatist has ever meant to claim in his responsible moments, even if more extravagant claims were occasionally made in the heat of polemic during the earlier years of pragmatism. Mere thinking will not add a cubit to one's stature; nor will the mere wishes of beggars furnish them with horses on which they might ride. A careful interpreter of pragmatism has recently said with entire justice: "we do not then ascribe to pragmatism the view that our wish or will to have reality this or that makes it so, except in the case of material changes worked by our muscles." [1]

In further defence of my claim to be a pragmatist, I might point out that pragmatists appear quite generally to have been making assertions about the world as a whole. They have affirmed that it is not static, not an eternally completed whole; but that it is dynamic, in fact, undergoing constant change and reconstruction. And how can the pragmatist make such assertions? Could it not be objected that 'static' and 'dynamic,' 'change' and 'reconstruction' are terms that arise exclusively within reflective situations, and that it will not do to hypostasize them, and predicate them of the world as a whole? The answer is, I suppose, that these characterizations apply to all the situations that human experience has known. They meet the tests that we can give them with the tools forged within experience—workability, coherence, consistency, exclusiveness and the rest. So pragmatists have not been afraid to posit certain of them as characteristic of the world as a whole. I have endeavored to show that there are genuine reflective situations in which arise the problems on which I have touched. So though possibly somewhat heretical—or at least extremely latitudinarian—I do not think that I deserve to be read out of the pragmatistic communion altogether.

It is time, I believe, for pragmatists, no less than for realists and idealists, to endeavor to ascertain how much of the contributions of other schools we can accept and make our own. Too

[1] W. H. Sheldon, *Strife of Systems and Productive Duality*, p. 278. *Cf.* also the citations therein given from James, Dewey, and A. W. Moore, pp. 268–278.

much time has been wasted in polemic. And while I believe that much constructive work has been done in our time by all three schools, this has not been realized, even by philosophers themselves. Everybody has been too much impressed by the 'strife of systems,' and needs to learn from Professor Sheldon[1] that each system has been for the most part right in what it has affirmed, and wrong chiefly in what it has denied. Only by a broadly synthetic attitude can the philosopher effectively maintain, either his traditional rôle of spectator of all time and existence, or his more recent aspirations to be an interpreter of the sciences and a contributor to the reconstruction of modern life.

WILLIAM KELLEY WRIGHT.

DARTMOUTH COLLEGE.

1 W. H. Sheldon, *The Strife of Systems and Productive Duality*, pages 412–415; *cf.* pp. 36, f.; 65, f.; 81–83; 100–104; 164, f.; 218–221; 243; 283–286; 307; 334; 404–406.